NAPPER TANDY

by

Susan Ronnie

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Foreword

I have called this booklet 'Napper Tandy' because that nickname was given to me when a child as it was the name of an Irish Rebel years ago and it is said I was a rebel too!

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NAPPER TANDY

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The day that I first saw daylight — I was born a little earlier than expected which meant I was a problem from the first. There was little money for such emergencies and an aunt made the offer 'If you look after her till I marry, I will take responsibility for her. So I was named Susannah after the said aunt! — but until she was ready to receive me — I was to be looked after by several other so-called 'Aunts and Uncles' and one 'Granma on the Walsall Road' — (no relatives) for my first years, so that my parents could work and earn the money they needed, for soon — brothers and sisters arrived and times were hard. Owing to the arrangements that had to be made for caring for me — I was to all intents and purposes brought up as an only child — and when eventually my Aunt married and offered to take care of me — she was intensely possessive and would not allow me to play with other children — or see my sisters and brothers. So I went first to 'Granma on the Walsall Road'. I did not understand what was said about me, but I judged people by the tone of their voice. Some sounded kind — others not so kind. Granma on the Walsall Road was very strict but kind — she had been a children's nurse so understood me. One day, when I was about three years of age I heard a lady with a kind voice in the next garden and I struggled to get through the hole in the fence but got stuck and cried out, 'Granma' came running out to see what the noise was about and pulled me uncere-moniously through the hedge — and showed her disapproval by smacking me hard on my seat! My first punishment — one of many to follow!!

I was happy enough at Grandma on the Walsall Road's — but left the hedge in the garden severely alone!

One day I wandered for the first time into a room where the blind was always down — and on the table were ferns and plants but the room seemed very cold, and I was interested in looking round when suddenly

the door opened and my guardian shook me severely and said 'You must never, never come in here, child' and I had a smart smack and wondered what ever I had done. I learned afterwards that this room was the 'holy of holies' and was never used except on the occasion of funerals — a kind of sacred place! This was the custom of those days to keep the parlour separate from the living rooms.

Lesson No. 1 — don't be inquisitive!

Vine Cottage

Then one day I was taken to the home of an 'Aunt and Uncle' — Aunt Sarah and Uncle John — no relation — who lived in a tiny black and white cottage which looked top heavy for the upper part jutted out over the lower half. The base was painted black — the upper storey white. It looked so odd as if a crazy builder had built it. I was now nearly five years of age — and very interested in everything I saw. Aunt Sarah was kind, but firm. Uncle John was much more kind and laughed a lot. He had blue eyes that twinkled, but sometimes he was very quiet and thoughtful. This was when he sat at a table in the window, reading a big black book with a brass clasp. I watched him as he sat reading — and he looked sad and seemed to be talking quietly to himself. I sat looking at him and wondered why he looked sad — then he would close the book, which I learned later was a big old Bible. Then he would take a small tin out of his pocket — and put some powder in his hand — then take a little between his right finger and thumb and sniff hard. Then he would sneeze (violently) and make me laugh and I would clap my hands and say, 'More, Uncle John, more!' And he would repeat the performance for my benefit.

I was happy at Vine Cottage — and often heard the word 'school'. I did not know what this meant but it had something to do with me because everyone looked at me and nodded!

I was too young to realise that Aunt Sarah was often tired and stayed in bed for days — then one day Uncle John said 'Child, take this note to the doctor in the village'. I was very proud to be asked to do this — and felt very important. So off I went. I knew the doctor's house — and ran along on my important errand. I knocked at the door — and our beloved Nurse Turner (who brought all the babies along!) smiled at me and said 'Wait child'. She returned with the bottle wrapped in white paper, with red sealing wax on the top. Off I toddled holding the precious bottle very carefully. Now one side of the lane in which I lived had a bank, a ditch, another bank and a hedge along the top. I jumped over the brook and started to walk along the top — there I picked some leaves from the hawthorn hedge and ate them — we children called it 'bread and

cheese'. Then I saw a lovely sight, a beautiful coloured butterfly. I began to chase it from bush to bush, and every time I got near it — off it flew. So as I got tired — I let him fly away and I jumped the ditch again and ran home to the cottage. But when I got there I was surprised to see a crowd of people — standing staring at me. One woman rushed towards me and snatched the bottle out of my hand and said, 'She's dead and it's all *your* fault'. I did not understand — what was 'dead' and what did 'fault' mean?

I learned afterwards that the medicine would not have saved Aunt Sarah — she died of a heart attack, and nothing could be done for her.

Then Uncle John moved to the lower part of the cottage and left the upper room just as it was in Aunt Sarah's lifetime.

So once more it was time for me to move on — to another home!

A Slice of Life — London

After a long tiring train journey we reached what was to be my new home — it had been arranged that I should live with a real aunt — who had no children. As we entered the room I saw with surprise (for I had not had any toys before) a little whicker chair — and in it sat a doll — it was called a Dutch doll. It was wooden, with jointed arms and legs — and its hair black painted on its head and blobs of red on its cheeks, and a tiny tea set was on a little table. In me at that moment was born a sense of possession, that doll was mine — it belonged to me. I was taught to try to sew and make clothes for the doll but it was no good, I either cobbled the sewing up or the cotton came out and it all came to pieces.

Then I had my sixth birthday — and was given a new kind of doll — she was big and had a round happy face and real hair — and woollen clothes on. I treasured her and called her 'Dolly'. Then winter came and one day I thought Dolly was cold so I stood her in front of the fire — and soon I noticed her face was getting longer and longer — it was horrid — you see she was a wax doll and was melting in the heat from the fire and I shrieked, and my aunt came and took off her clothes and took her away. I was disconsolate and very unhappy. I was told 'If you are a good girl you shall have a surprise one day'. I did not know what a surprise was but I knew it was something for me. I was lost without a doll — the little wooden doll didn't look so nice now. Then things seemed to happen — there seemed an air of excitement — parcels arrived and were taken away to be hidden, I was told 'not to touch things — if I found parcels wrapped up'. Then I was told 'Christmas would soon be here and there would be lots of surprises if I was a good girl. It was all very exciting — a cake was made, and what was called a Christmas Pudding. Then one day a tree arrived — I was told that was a Christmas tree. Little packets were

put on its branches — and joy of joys! a fairy doll on the top branch. The next thing I saw was one of my black Cashmere stockings on the table but was not told why it was there. Then my aunt said 'Now you must write a little letter to Father Christmas'. That was a poser for I didn't know where he lived! but I wrote the letter, told him I wanted a beautiful doll and sent it to London!!

As I sat in my whicker chair, dressed for the night, with my hair curled up in rags I looked round and began to feel very excited — then I was told that Father Christmas would come and he would find on the table a glass of wine and a mince pie. Then it was 'off to bed, child' — but I could not sleep. I wanted to keep awake to see this Father Christmas. But, childlike, I was soon fast asleep. I woke early — it was still dark and I felt something on my bed. It was my black stocking — heavy and full of something. I started to feel what it would be and out came an orange, an apple, some nuts, a new penny, a sucky mouse, all pink with string for a tail and I could just see by the light at the window — a little book called Brer Rabbit, 2 pence! So *HE* had been then! I was so excited and got out of bed, and went to the top of the stairs — and *there* I saw a new pram and sitting in it, with her arms outstretched, a beautiful real baby doll! — Such excitement! Then I went downstairs and *there* on the table was an empty glass and a plate with crumbs on! and a big box with potatoes, carrots and cabbages, things which of course I thought Father Christmas had brought!! Little did I know, innocent that I was, that a friend of my Uncle's *always* sent them a box of home grown vegetables — and that my Uncle had drunk the wine and eaten the mince pie! The age of innocence!

This beautiful doll was my most prized possession — but she brought sadness as well as joy — for every time I did wrong (which was *very* often) — I was threatened 'If you are a naughty girl the doll will be taken away from you'.

So many times this happened — I'm sorry to say she was more often put away in her box than I had the pleasure of her company! — But I was still often naughty. In these days I was given bread and butter on week days and bread and butter and jam on Sundays, but if I had been a naughty girl — I had bread and butter all the week! For my breakfast I had 'fishes' — a basin of hot milk with bread pieces and sugar in! There were no such things as cereals or cornflakes in those days! And my Aunt could not afford jam so she cut rhubarb from the garden — cut it up in pieces and put it in water and brown sugar in a big stone jar and left it cooking in the oven all night. *That* made jam!

Every house had a small black stove in the kitchen — all black leaded and the brass taps shining and a coal fire was kept in all day and night to

provide hot water and heat for cooking and such food as sausages and bacon were cooked in a 'Dutch oven' which was a tin with a hood — and the food was hung up in it and cooked on a little platform in front of the fire.

School

While living with my Aunt and Uncle I went to school — called Chapel End School, which was about a mile from our house. I always wore a pretty overall for school — and wore a clean one if I was being taken out to tea. The pinafore was trimmed with lace and had a blue or pink bow on the yoke. Each morning I was given a halfpenny to spend at the sweet shop and I usually bought two brazil nuts inside dates and covered with coconut. But if I had been naughty I was given an envelope with cocoa powder and sugar instead of the usual money. This was eaten in playtime. We used slates to write on, with slate pencils, for paper was too dear and every child had a small duster to clean the slate with. In the infants school we had to pay a penny a week to go to school. We learned scripture, reading, writing and arithmetic — all simple subjects — which formed the basis of our education, and handwriting was of special importance. It is noticed how many great and clever men in years gone by have risen to the highest positions in the land — all having learned the simple subjects of reading, writing and arithmetic. Nowadays education is very technical and computerised — yet sad to relate many students leave school unable to read or write or even speak well.

Chapel End and Broken Window

On my way to school I often jumped across the ditch at the side of the road — on to the bank — which my Aunt called 'being very unladylike' — and on one occasion I wore a clean pinafore in the afternoon as we were going out to tea with a friend. I was happily jumping over the ditch when I saw my Aunt coming towards me — and promptly fell in the ditch — which was inches deep in dirty water. The picture I presented was anything but pleasing to my Aunt — she marched me home and I was put to bed with no tea!

There was one boy I did not like, and one day coming home from school I caught sight of him through the double window of the grocer's shop. I did not hesitate — I picked up a stone and threw it hard at the window — it knocked all the packets down and broke both windows. The man came running out of the door, he was *very* angry, and he said to my so-called friends 'What's her name?' They told him and where I lived! and when I got home my Aunt said 'Whatever is wrong, you look as if

you've lost a shilling and found a penny,' I said nothing, but the next evening when I was at 'Band of Hope' a policeman arrived with the owner of the shop and told my Uncle what I had done! When I got home he asked 'Have you broken a window?' I said 'Yes' and he said 'If you had not told me the truth you'd have had a thrashing'. So truth pays! Sadly — when war came to England that boy became a soldier and was killed in battle — which made me feel very sad.

Sunday School Treat

One important event of the year was to go to the Forest for a Sunday School treat. We were taken in 'Brake's' (horse and cart) and each child had to take a mug to drink tea or lemonade from and this was worn round the neck on a ribbon. When we arrived at a place in the forest called 'Theyden Bois' we unloaded and ran about very excitedly, and rushed through the gate. My Aunt had given me a threepenny piece to spend. When we arrived on the field I saw a stall where they sold presents — and I bought a brooch for my Aunt for twopence three farthings which only left me a farthing to spend; and soon we reached all the fun of the fair — roundabouts and coconut shies — here was excitement indeed! And a boy came up to me and said 'Will you be my sweetheart?' I didn't know what sweetheart meant but I said 'Yes' and he said 'come on the dobby horses then (that was another name for the roundabout). So when the music stopped, we stepped up and each climbed on a horse and when all the horses were taken up, the music started and we began to go round and round, the man came for the halfpennies — and when he came to me I said 'That boy's my sweetheart, he will pay'. But Percy Turnpenny (*that* was his name — the son of the chemist) said 'Oh! I am her sweetheart but I'm not paying for her.' The man stopped the music and said 'Git orf you' — and pushed me down onto the grass. That was the end of my first romance — I was 6½ — he was 8! and very ungallant!

Pear Tree Farm

'I was about 7 when my Uncle said 'We are going to live on a farm'. The head of the firm where my Uncle worked was deaf and dumb and he owned a farm in Halstead — which had been badly neglected by the man he had chosen to attend to the business of running the farm and so my Uncle was asked if he would go to Halstead for a few years to get the business of the farm in order. So the day came when everything was packed up to be delivered to Halstead. Our personal things we carried and took the dog — and also the cat in his basket. It was an exciting journey and when we arrived at the station we were met by a man in a

trap — a high seated cart, which was to be our only means of transport while we were at the farm. The old horse clip-clopped along and it was very pleasant sitting high up — looking at the country as we passed. After a few miles we were told 'Here is Pear Tree Farm'. We saw a long low wall and on the gate 'PEAR TREE FARM' and standing beside the gate were Mr and Mrs French, the couple who were engaged to clean and cook for us during our stay at the farm. As we drove through the gates I saw with delight, a pond on which was a flat bottomed boat — and strangest of all, a big black pig wallowing in the pond. The farm house was a long low grey building — and the walls were covered with yellow roses — which scented the air. The farmhouse interior was welcoming and Mrs French called to me 'Come, look here, little one', and she opened the window which went almost to the bottom of the wall and said 'Look', and there I saw lots of baby rabbits scampering past in the field. I was thrilled and when I went in to the farm yard there were chickens and ducks and doves in a dove-cote. I was very happy because it was all so different from any other home I had known. I was the only child anywhere around. Mr and Mrs French lived in the cottage opposite the farm. The men who worked on the farm made a great fuss of me and used to suck birds' eggs and thread them on string to make me necklaces to wear, which we know now, in these days of conservation was very wrong indeed. I used to gather watercress from the swift-flowing stream — where I saw hundreds of tiddlers (tiny fish) darting hither and thither. I was allowed to collect the hens' eggs from the hedges round the farm. Battery hens had not been introduced in those days — all creatures were free.

Harvest time was my favourite time. All the men who lived around joined in to help get the harvest in while the weather was good. One day I wandered through the gate — the workers were all sitting round eating and drinking. My aunt missed me and in her anxiety she called Mrs French, who said 'Don't be angry, Ma'ma, the little one is only having a sup of beer and a bite of cheese with the men'. My aunt was furious — and when she found me she dragged me unceremoniously back to the house, where I had a whacking with the cane and put to bed!!

I went to school in the village — and quickly settled down to country life. My aunt never allowed me to play with other children — so it was a real joy to play with the children at the school.

There was plenty of fun on the farm — and those were happy days.

We stayed at Pear Tree Farm for three years — At last the day came for us to say Goodbye to the farm — the animals and our helpers and friends. We mounted the 'trap' laden with fruit and eggs given us by friends, and as we moved off I turned to see Mrs French wipe her eyes with the corner

of her apron.

I was very sad — and made up my mind that one day in the future I would return to see the farm.

Then the question of a new school arose and I was sent to a nearby council school.

Empire Day

In honour of Empire Day — a great occasion at the schools — a performance by the girls and the boys of the school was held in the school playground — it was a combined effort and caused much excitement preparing for the great day. A great tableau was arranged, each student being dressed in the native dress of the country they represented — I for my part was chosen to represent Wales, and was resplendent in a tall shiny hat, with a white frill round the face — a coloured skirt, and a shawl about my shoulders — and in my hand I carried the emblem of Wales — I was very proud indeed and at the chosen hour, we arranged ourselves as instructed — in rows — and in front of me was a boy representing New Zealand, which was famous the world over for its fine fish — and in his basket were some good specimens — tastefully arranged. Now this boy suddenly turned round, pointed to my tall hat and laughed loudly. Without a second's hesitation I bent down, picked up a fish and threw it at him. He dared to laugh at my hat — of which I was justly proud, and he must take the consequences! Well, I scarcely registered in my mind all the pandemonium that followed this incident — but we were called to order by a very irate headmistress — to proceed with the tableau. I felt ill with nerves and what the outcome of it all would be. I was to know, all too soon — for when the performance was over I had a summons to appear before the headmistress in her room. A sobering thought. She informed me that she had received a message from the headmaster of the boys school — to appear in his study. How I felt, crossing the grounds and eventually making my way to the Headmaster's room — led by his secretary — I remember to this day. There was absolute silence as I entered, and there stood the Headmaster, in his gown, and 'New Zealand', evidently still smarting from my attack! The Head cleared his throat, and after reading the riot act, informed me that I should be expected to apologise to the boy — and to him. My voice sounded a long way off, as if it did not belong to me; then, having turned to both in turn, I said my piece. I kept my eyes riveted to my shoes, and waited for the next move. I heard the Headmaster dismiss the boy and then he turned to me, and like a ray of sunshine in a stormy sky, I detected a smile about his mouth and he said quietly 'Don't let this ever occur again . . . dismiss'. As

I walked slowly away, I wept, not from sorrow, but from sheer happiness because of that little smile!

I can never see a nice fat mackerel on the fishmonger's slab, or a Welsh Hat, without vividly recalling that Empire Day!

Scarlet Fever

Soon after we returned from the farm my aunt noticed I had spots on my face and called in the doctor who said it was Scarlet Fever, which was very prevalant in those days. As the hospital was full of patients I was allowed to stay at home as there were no other children in the house. I was confined to my bedroom for three weeks — till the spots cleared. My uncle was not allowed to come near me — only my aunt came to my room, and at the door hung a sheet, with its end dipped in a pail containing strong carbolic, and my aunt had to wear a white overall and remove it at the door. My uncle fixed up a pail at the window on a rope and pully and he used to stand beneath my window and send gifts up to me — a bright new penny, or little twopenny reading books, and when I was better all those books had to be burned. I could not have my dolls, but the time passed quite happily.

Then at last I returned to school, and had to work hard because I had missed so many lessons.

* * * * *

I often got into trouble because some of the girls were bullies and used to dare me to do things — and I would always do what they dared me to!

The teachers used to be very angry — but I was afraid to tell them the girls had made me do naughty things — like putting our teacher's umbrella up the chimney! and cutting her orange in half and taking all the pulp out and sticking the halves together! But when the teacher cried and said she was not well, I cried too and promised never to do those things again!

Cookery Classes

Part of our education was to go to a house used as a cookery class. We were taught cookery, and another house was used for us to be taught laundry and 'housewifery'. All these classes were very useful when we grew older. We were allowed to make puddings and cakes and then buy them. We used to eat nearly all the currants! One day I made a 'suet roly poly' with currants in and I bought it when I had cooked it. I was on my way home with thick snow on the ground, and suddenly saw a postman and thought 'I'd like to knock his hat off', so I took aim with the pudding and hit his hat and it fell in the snow with the pudding. He said a lot of

words I hadn't heard before and I went and picked up the pudding and ran off home. My uncle liked to encourage me by eating what I cooked, so my aunt made it hot and he ate it, and said, as he always did to please me 'That's the best pudding I've *ever* tasted!' If only he knew — but where ignorance is bliss 'tis folly to be wise'!

April 1912 — The Titanic

A very sad and unforgettable occasion was when in the year 1912 the whole school was assembled in the hall — and groups of mistresses stood talking quietly, with very sad faces. The Headmistress appeared, in her gown, stood quite still for a moment, with hands tightly clasped together, then she spoke in very sad tones and said quietly . . . 'Girls, we are assembled here this morning to offer our prayers to God, for we have just had news that the greatest ship in the world has in fact, been sunk, on her maiden voyage, with few survivors. She was so we thought, unsinkable, but the ship struck an iceberg and stood no chance of escaping. We will pray quietly, please.' Such silences can rarely be met with as descends on an assembly of hundreds of children — they seem to absorb the atmosphere — and led by a much respected and admired headmistress we sang 'Oh, God our Help in Ages Past'. I cannot recall anything like this — the depth — the sorrow in the singing of this lovely hymn. Silence again, and the Headmistress's voice, trembling with emotion, said 'We will resume lessons'. There was no need to give orders for quiet or silence. We realised we had taken a small part in a great world's sorrow and we felt sad and humbled.

Holidays in the Country and Country Customs

At the end of term we made plans for holidays. My Aunt and Uncle and I always went into the country to stay with cousins and the difference we found between town and country was remarkable. Our cousins and Aunts lived on farms — and what I enjoyed most was being with the animals, and especially the young pink piglets and calves, and the young chicks. I was allowed to collect the hens' eggs from round the fields — no battery hens here. I used to enjoy walking round the fields — thick with buttercups and daisies and quaker grass and lady's slippers and at the end of one field which was rather low and very damp there was a whole area of golden king-cups. It was a beautiful sight. In the old days several people would join a pig-club and when the pig was to be killed the butcher came and the shrieks from the animal as it was being killed were terrible. Then when it was killed the butcher cut it up into joints for bacon and pork — and pounds of lard would be made from the fat and shared

out among the housewives who put the lard in jars and put it in the cool cellar to be used as desired. There would be pigs trotters (feet), and pig's cheek which would be made into delicious 'brawn' — nothing was wasted. Then in turn another member of the club would have his pig killed and it would be shared out. The joints would be rubbed well with salt petre to preserve them and put on cool shelves in the dairy and the bacon and hams would be hung on hooks in the farm kitchen in muslin bags and when the farmer's wife wanted bacon or ham for breakfast she would take a sharp knife and cut slices!, and with fresh eggs, fresh milk, home grown vegetables and fruit, country people were self-supporting. The customs of the country people were very interesting. Housewives worked hard. In those days — there was no electricity — lighting was lamp lighting and later, gas came. No cars, no radio, no television, no washing machines! A cottage housewife did all her own washing by hand and there were no detergents — only pure primrose soap and carbolic soap. Curtains made of Nottingham lace hung at every window. These were washed by hand — then a blue bag squeezed in the water to whiten the curtains — they were dried on the line in the garden — then when dry, pulled into shape, having been starched to stiffen them. Then ironed.

For the ordinary garments most housewives used a dolly and tub. That was a three-legged wooden contrivance used for bashing the garments in the tub — it was hard work! Then the articles would be put through an iron-framed mangle with heavy rollers to squeeze the water out. When the washing had dried on the line it was folded, then ironed (no electric iron in those days!). Every housewife owned two or three heavy irons which were heated for hours at the coal fire in the kitchen range — ironing was heavy tiring work but a woman took great pride in her washing. In these days of washing machines and numerous detergents — washing is never whiter than in the old days! A housewife was once asked what made her happiest to see, and she answered 'a line of washing blowing the the breeze!'

Each cottage had a built-in copper — a huge iron bowl fitted into a concrete base — and a fireplace underneath — and the first thing to be done on a wash day was to fill the copper with water — then to light the fire underneath and just wait for the water to get hot! This method of heating water was also used when people wanted to bath! Cottages did not have bathrooms — but outside the door of every cottage hung on a nail on the wall would be a long zinc bath — which was put in front of the fire and filled with hot water ready for the bath to be taken! Indoor toilets were non-existent, except in the better class houses, and the lavatory was at the bottom of the garden in a brick built hut. Fifty years ago life was

hard, a very little money. Country people were lucky because everything was home grown and home produced. Bread was baked at home and kept in a jowl — a large earthenware bowl in a cool cellar with the window open.

When a person was ill straw was strewn all over the road in front of the house, to deaden the noise made by carts with wooden wheels on the cobbled roads. Because of malnutrition and lack of expert medical knowledge, small children died for lack of nourishment — and the women usually died young because of bearing many children.

Postmen usually rode bicycles or on horseback for delivering post. Then there was the muffin man who carried the muffins in a big basket on his head and covered with green baize and he loudly rang a bell to announce his arrival. Cats meat men sold horseflesh on wooden skewers for cat food (no tins of cat food in those days!) — Coal men sold sacks of coal — price 1/11 a cwt! — and yelled something no-one could understand. Chimneys were swept by the chimney sweep who carried their long-handled brushes on their backs and to prove he had swept the chimney, the housewife would be asked to go outside and look at the brush poking out of the chimney pot! Street lamps were lit with oil — before gas was discovered and the lamp lighter would carry a long-handled stick with a flame on top to light the lamp. Milk was brought round in a churn on a small hand cart and the milkman measured the milk with a long-handled scoop from a bucket — measured into a jug. Eggs cost one shilling for 12, potatoes ½d and 1d a pound, meat was cheap — mutton 4½d a lb and salt was sold from a hand cart in large blocks which had to be crushed to make salt suitable for table and cooking use.

Linens and babies

Housewives years ago took particular pride in their 'linens'. Linen table cloths edged with hand-made lace were handed down from mother to daughter — and bed linen was a source of great pride. Sheets would be decorated with lace — or sometimes a 'false' sheet top would be edged with lace and turned over the plain sheet, to look attractive, and this would be removed at night. Beds also had 'valances' — drapings which reached to the floor all round the bed — also edged with lace. And pillowcases would be edged with lace — prettily goffered with a hot goffering iron to make it a frill. The housewife was very 'house conscious'. A woman's whole life was devoted to the care of her home and family.

When a new baby arrived, the mother might spend a month in bed — if necessary. The baby would be protected by layers and layers of clothes — a woollen vest, a 'binder', a flannel petticoat (long), a lawn or muslin

undergown, a top embroidered gown, a woollen matinee coat, a cloak, a large shawl, a woollen hat for a boy or a bonnet for a girl, and, when baby went out in what was called a 'basinette' it wore a fine veil (called a 'fall') to protect it from the winds! The wind was never allowed to blow on baby's face!

* * * * *

When the corn was safely gathered in, a harvest festival service was held and loaves of bread and baskets of fruit and vegetables were taken to the churches and placed on the altar and hymns sung to praise God for the good things man had grown. Great excitement when the annual circus came to town with all the fun of the fair. Roundabouts and coconut shies and ice creams! There were few toys — money was far too scarce, and home life played a much more important part in life. There were such toys as musical tops, which when wound up with a key played a tune. Then there were marbles which needed skill — and diablo — and card games like Happy Families! Life was lived at a much slower pace and people were more content — Perhaps it was no use complaining! A workman earned about thirty shillings or two pounds a week, women did not go to work except to help at harvest time. They were expected to cook and clean and care for their husband and families. Sunday evenings were reserved for a family sing-song round a piano if one was lucky enough to possess one, or a harmonium (a small organ). Sunday was a day to dress up and go to Sunday school and church — but one always changed into one's old clothes after going to church!

Infants progressed from writing on a slate with a slate pencil to using pen or ink. On each school desk there would be two ink wells — one for each child and every child had a pen wiper (a pad of several thicknesses of flannel, stitched in the middle to wipe the inky pen nib on).

Children stayed at the village school till they were ready to go to a 'big' school. In later years — unhappily many of our village schools have been closed — the school bell rings no more and the children meet at a certain spot (usually the village green) to be picked up by the driver of a school bus, and taken to a nearly big school. So village life has never been the same since no children around all day — most of the village schools were sold and used as private homes.

The rich country people indulged in hunting the fox (and still do) and would ride rough shod over the land accompanied by numerous hounds. The huntsmen (in pink coats) so they were called though they were red! This is and always has been a very traditional part of English life. The 'meet' took place in the village and huntsmen and hounds gathered at the gate of a neighbour and when they moved off my cousins and I often

followed them on the hunt. We could keep the fox in view and one could only wish that the poor frightened creature would escape what would be a terrible end — if he were caught. We saw one caught on one occasion — and in a matter of minutes the poor beast was torn to bits. It was a dreadful sight, but far worse was to see the 'blooding' of the Colonel's daughter. She was only in her teens and was to be honoured by 'blooding'. The fox's blood was gathered up and some put on both her cheeks. And she rode away proud and triumphant — to be thus honoured; and as the Master of the Hunt passed us, he smiled and saluted us as always, but I had no smile for him. All I could think of was that child's face with the fox's blood on her cheeks. And though I liked to see the horses, huntsmen and hounds, my interest in hunting ended that day. It savours of savagery.

Canals

Canals were used for transporting coal and other commodities from one place to another in long, low boats drawn by a horse along the canal tow path. In later years canal transport has diminished and is now rarely used though many attempts are being made to re-establish this form of transport, as the roads become more and more congested with motor traffic. In my young days 80 years ago — cars were very rare — but now there are millions on the roads.

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Cottage gardens

Cottage gardens provided flowers in profusion and many people collected the petals in the sun to preserve them to provide sweet scents for placing in rooms to make the air pleasant. In particular lavender is collected and rubbed between the palms of the hands, and put in little bags — called lavender bags — which are placed among house-linen. Then petals, when dried, are placed in a container with holes in and a delightful scent is exuded. These are called 'pot pourries'.

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Chickens

A sound we rarely hear today is the clucking of hens — which were kept in most cottage gardens and the crowing of the Cock Bird or rooster, who ruled the roost! These provided fresh eggs for the cottagers' families — there were no battery hens in those days. The birds were free.

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The Good Old Days!

The older ones among us are fond of referring to the 'good old days', but were they *really* so good? The poor were very poor and the rich were very rich — the poor were slaves of the rich. Little children were employed in coal mines until there was a law against the practice. Many rich and powerful businesses of today have to thank the slavery of the young and the poor people for their prosperity.

But in spite of the hardships — home life was different. Home was the centre of the family, and people were content in spite of the hardships.

Customs and Cures

All houses had knife cleaning machines. The knives were made of steel, with bone handles. They were inserted one by one in the machine and, having been treated with bath brick — the handle was turned and the result was clean knives!

One pastime, when and if a housewife had spare time — was the making of rug mats. In every home and cottage one would see these colourful mats, as clothes wore out, the material was used for rugs. Strips of all colours were cut and patterns worked with a large hook by making holes in a backing of hessian cloth — and drawing the strips through. The most lovely designs were created by the housewife and the rugs were handed down from generation to generation, as were the patchwork quilts made by sewing squares and shapes of different materials — nothing in the home was wasted!, and all these rugs and quilts were beautiful, and now very valuable!

Women, unless they belonged to the rich class, had very little jewellery but all wore black jet — beads and bracelets — and old ladies wore black capes embroidered beautifully with small beads. Ladies boots (no shoes yet) cost about twelve shillings and sixpence. They were button-up boots with a patent leather toe piece which was always cleaned with a rag dipped in milk to make it shine!

Cures for ailments were very effective for a sore throat, my Aunt would obtain my black wool cashmere stocking — dip it in goose-oil (grease) tie it tightly round my neck!

For toothache she would dip a piece of brown paper in vinegar and ginger and slap it on my cheek — it would burn but nearly always cured the ache!

Tooth extraction was a painful business and was performed by the village doctor. Often one was put in a chair and given a whiff of chloroform and for days would have a swollen face! Some had a more painful treatment. A piece of string tied round a tooth and attached to a

door handle — the door shut quickly and hopefully the tooth would be extracted! The victim usually received a penny for this! Friday nights were bath nights and medicine night. The children would all be lined up to receive a dose of 'brimstone and treacle' and earned another penny each! One day my Aunt when young gave her little brother *her* dose of brimstone and treacle and her penny! What happened I never knew!!!

T.B. (Tuberculosis) was rife and many children and old people died of it. There were no contraceptives or 'pills' in those days, and every baby who was born was looked upon as 'another mouth to feed'.

A regular visitor round the village was the rag-and-bone man who called his wares and offered a balloon for old clothing. Many a child has given away clothes of his parents — for a balloon! Errand boys were employed by butchers, bakers and greengrocers for a few shillings a week. These lads would pedal away whistling loudly the latest song of the day. While newsboys with bundles of papers in their arms would stand on street corners calling 'Pipers — evening pipers' (papers!).

Most men in country villages worked in farms or went in to the pits. The miners would walk miles to the pit and miles under the ground to get to their work. Then after a hard day's work, would walk home again! Many miners lived in miners' cottages provided by the pit owners. In a village where a cousin of mine kept a farm — there were several such cottages and because of the very low wages paid to the miners each miner was allowed one ton of coal a year free, and if more than one miner lived in a cottage each one got the ton of coal. In one cottage lived a father and two sons in the mines and they each had a free ton of coal. And as they only had one small fireplace in the cottage they could not burn it all so they sold it and my cousin's farm bordered on the garden of that cottage and one day as he walked round his field he noticed his hedge was disturbed and discovered the miner had hidden a lot of coal there! I do not think the gift of coal is given now as the miners, who used to earn thirty shillings a week, now earn over £100 a week and whereas they went to work and came back dirty and covered in coal dust in most mines, now the men go to work in ordinary clothes, change, go down the mine in cages (lifts) and when the day's work is done they have a bath, change clothes and go home clean!

Another sight of olden days was a man playing a street organ and on the top of the organ was a small monkey dressed in a red wool coat. This provided much excitement for the children.

Old age was a sad time — no provision was made for the poor old people and when the time came that they could no longer support themselves — husbands and wives went to the workhouse — a grey

gloomy place where the husband went to the men's part and the wives were sent to the women's entrance — so they parted and were very sad. Conditions inside the workhouse were uncomfortable and cold — and dreaded by old people. Age was not respected in those hard times, it was called 'going to the parish'. Rich people used to meet and *make* coarse clothes for the inmates. And when girls gave birth to unwanted babies, the babies were taken from them at birth and they never saw them again. These were called charitable institutions.

Crime and Punishment

Punishment for crime was severe — for a man stealing bread for his hungry family there was the 'birch' — long twigs bound together and the man had to bend over and was beaten on his bare back with the birch, or for some crimes he would be put in the 'stocks' — wooden structures with a bar and a hole cut in it where he put his head through and his arms and feet were put in holes so that he was unable to move. But for really serious offences he might be hung on a 'gibbet' — a tall wooden structure with a rope made into a noose, and was hanged till he died. There are many lanes called Gibbet Lane around the country as a reminder of what took place in those places.

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Then in most villages there was a 'lock-up' — a round brickbuilt place where people were put for the night. The doors were locked securely and the bars prevented any escape.

In days gone by, wrong-doers were deported to foreign lands. They were taken from their families and homes and put on a ship — to become slaves in a far-off country.

Punishment was very severe, but in these days the pendulum has swung the other way and punishment is not severe enough. There is more crime and violence than has ever been known before.

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The Workhouse

A building apart from the Workhouse housed people who had skin diseases — they were isolated and badly neglected. I remember going into the building and seeing two doors with grills with bars — like prison cells — and in each one a girl who had a skin disease. Treatment just consisted of isolating these cases — nothing much was done to try to cure them. In these days there are modern means of curing the diseases.

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Bed-Warming

Knowing the luxury of an electric blanket I recalled the time when poor people kept a brick in the oven of the kitchen range, to be hot by bedtime when it would be wrapped in a piece of blanket and put in the bed. For the more wealthy people a copper bed warmer would be used — a long handled affair with a round copper circle with holes in. This would be filled with hot charcoal and put in the bed. These articles are now much sought after by collectors.

But the poor — the hot brick had given way to a bottle made of earthenware and filled with boiling water — these kept hot much longer than the brick!

Transport

In the country the chief form of transport was the carrier's cart — fares were cheap and the horse was made much use of. Motor cars were non-existent — and though in this day and age we have traffic jams caused through so many cars on the road — in early days — I have seen London streets crowded with horse-drawn vehicles of every possible description — when omnibuses came into being — they were open topped and there was no protection from the weather but covers were provided on the seats which could be used to cover oneself in rain and snow. Then trams appeared on the streets — they ran on lines in the road and made a terrific noise as they clanged along — especially as the trams crossed the lines. Railway trains by now had appeared. In the first place the railway carriages were open like cattle trucks — with no protection from the weather. As time wore on they had roofs and were more comfortable to ride in! People of high degree, like royalty — travelled in trains which were fitted out like luxurious rooms, with every comfort, as indeed is the case today. Our royal family travel in pure luxury — and often they work as they travel, in a room furnished as an office — beside which there are sitting rooms and rooms for sleeping — but this form of travel is rarely used now — with the advent of the motor car and aeroplane, and nowadays the other means of travel for the Royal Family is their floating home — the great ship Britannia, which is the last word in luxury travel.

It is hard to believe in these days, when trains travel at 120 miles an hour or more — and aeroplanes rush through the skies at a faster speed than sound — that it was a matter of wonder when motor cars and trains moved at 10–15 miles an hour and a man used to walk in front of the motor car with a red flag to warn people of its approach and horses used

to take fright at the sight of the car!

College Days

While all these changes were taking place I was growing up and had reached an age when there was the question of education. I began training at college at the age of 15 — and it was proposed that I train for the Civil Service, as my Uncle said, I should receive a pension when I grew old and retired! That was looking ahead a few years, but people gave much thought to the future in those days. Security was the most important thing. So — to college I went and began studying. The college was a very big old house — it had been a lovely home in its early days. The most attractive thing about it to my mind was the wide, winding staircase with a solid mahogany rail running from top to bottom. I found this fascinating and immediately began to enjoy sliding down from the top to the post at the bottom! This pleasure was short-lived — I was caught by the head of the college — who ordered me to go to his room for a lecture on behaving as a tom-boy or a young lady! I knew which was the greatest fun — but I had to reform or else be expelled if I didn't behave! A report on my behaviour was sent to my Uncle — that meant another lecture!!

The college was divided into one part for girls (or young ladies as we were now called) — and one for boys (young gentlemen). The girls wore uniform — navy blue skirt and jacket, white blouse, black shoes and black cashmere stockings, panama hat in the summer and velour hat in the winter and always one wore gloves! — no young lady ever went out without gloves! Boys wore black striped trousers, short black jackets, red tie and boater hats. These must be worn always. As we became used to college routine, we young ladies began to notice the young gentlemen and it was amusing to be walking to college and find a boy pop up from nowhere and ask 'may I carry your satchel for you?' — that was the first approach! There was one boy, always dressed immaculately, who wore a rose in a silver flower holder in his lapel of his jacket. After a while he used to give me the rose, which I wore pinned on my tie with my college badge. The other girls were jealous of this favour and I remember to this day the morning I received no rose, and then saw another girl wearing it — which was the boy's way of saying he had found another girlfriend! My second romance crashed!

I have written so far of the simple, innocent days in my life — when the most exciting thing was the cricket match on the village green, the yearly fair, the maypole dance on the green, the Morris dancers who delighted

us with their jingling bells, and I touched lightly on the gradual changes that were taking place in transport and our way of life — some of us remembered hearing our elders talk of the Boer War and the Crimean War. I heard of an ancestor of mine who served on a ship as a Master at Arms in the Crimean War and who was shot in the leg by the enemy guns and had his leg amputated without an anaesthetic — the only pain killer was a strong dose of whisky or rum! and his pain so terrible that ever after he was insensible to pain, and he thought everyone else was immune and showed no mercy. But now there was a sense of foreboding in the air — like the onset of a storm — people spoke of the Germans and their 'preparations'. In the political world and all over the country there was a feeling of impending disaster. We, in our studies at the college had no inkling of what was to come.

We went to our annual dance at the Atheneum, which was a great event. Our pretty dresses were made — we bought our perfume — either Phulnana or Californian Poppy — which to modern taste was *too* strong — and heavy. We bought cachous of violet — breath sweeteners! — and obtained our dance programmes of pink or blue with the tiny pencils attached, for our partners to sign their names when they claimed a dance! The favourite was the supper dance — for then our partners brought our supper to us — and when it was consumed, would invite us to 'take the air' on the terrace — or we may have chosen to sit on the stairs to talk quietly! There was a saying among the boys, out of hearing of parents, that 'I'm no good at dancing but I'm a devil on the stairs!!' Then 'Take your partners for the next dance please,' boomed out as the band struck up a tune — and off we went. Either the 'Valeta' or the 'Barn Dance' or 'Fox Trot' which was for us the latest exciting dance. Then we heard a name called which meant someone's parent had come to take one of us home. We were never allowed to go home alone. We were accompanied to and from the dance hall. But most of us girls went home with our heart aflutter because of some conquest we'd made.

That year all the college students were taken to Earls Court, where there were pleasures of every description — there was so much to see and enjoy we hardly knew what to choose. I noticed a very quiet boy looking at me — and he came up and asked 'Would you care to come on the Tunnel of Love with me?' The Tunnel of Love was a meandering stream — lit up with hundreds of coloured fairy lights — and we sat in a small boat for two and slowly moved along to the music. Suddenly, my companion asked 'Will you be my friend?' I said 'Yes'. He asked 'Shall we seal it with a kiss?' I agreed and that was the beginning of a lifetime of happiness for we eventually married and had one son and a daughter,

and we enjoyed a happy family life for many years, which ended by the sudden death of that 'quiet boy' in 1956.

Having thoroughly enjoyed our outing to Earls Court, the young ladies and young gentlemen settled down again to their studies.

The college was fortunate in having three tennis courts at the rear, flanked on either side by avenues of trees. At the approach to the courts was a round pond, with a fountain playing in the centre and goldfish in the water. We played tennis, and as it was such a hot day we four girls decided to go to the college tuck shop for ices when we heard 'Britain at war with Germany' the paper boys shouted. My three friends and I just stopped and listened and then we realised what the recent weeks had meant — preparation for war — we seemed to grow up then, we had no idea what war would mean, but there was fear in everybody's heart. It was 1914 and life was never the same again.

War

Suddenly everything was thrown into confusion and young men were conscripted into the armed Forces. Posters appeared everywhere, with a picture of Lord Kitchener pointing and saying 'Your country expects you to do your duty'. Our studies at the college were disrupted and I was told I should be leaving — as many other students did. With so many young men being called up for duty there were plenty of opportunities of employment for girls who were trained and I applied for a position as shorthand typist in a Government department of the Ministry of Munitions. Hotels were emptied of residents and were taken over by the Government — I worked in the Hotel Metropole in Northumberland Avenue, London and we moved in before the place was cleared to accommodate the hundreds of typists. Furniture still remained in the rooms — pianos were left in the corridors and we girls had much fun playing them and dancing!, also the 'powder rooms' were still as they had always been — and we girls used to wash our hair and take baths but gradually all this changed, the pianos and furniture all disappeared and cloakroom attendants took charge in the 'cloakrooms' as the powder rooms were called — and plugs were removed from the baths so that we could no longer have baths! Each typist had a room to herself and we were provided with furniture and machines and the serious business commenced. The huge 'Salle a manger' (or dining room) was taken over as a lunch room for hundreds of workers and we indulged in leisurely teas — with cream cakes provided — but after a while all these luxuries disappeared for everyone was to be rationed for food. A remarkable

coincidence occurred. I went to live in Bexhill in Sussex and went into a cake shop for tea and complimented the pastry cook on his delicious cakes and he said 'I used to be head pastry cook at the Hotel Metropole in the first world war and when I told him I had worked there he was astounded. We were both elderly by then!

The staff at the Ministry of Munitions was paid very high salaries and we had little to do because we were overstaffed. I got very bored and left the Ministry. I obtained a post at Marconi House in the Strand, with the Belgian branch of Marconi's Wireless Company, known as the Societe Anonomé de Telegraphie Sans Fils, who had fled from the Germans when they marched into Brussels. The name simply means the Belgian Wireless Company! — I was the only girl employed until a Belgian girl named Germaine Donne fled from Brussels and was able to get on a boat coming to England. She had been educated in a Belgian convent and spoke German fluently — so she was not molested by the German officers because they thought she was German. She taught me embroidery which she had learnt to do in the convent. Our offices occupied the top floor of the Marconi House, very high up and it was a wonderful sight to open the windows and look over the Strand and London. It was very exciting. In those days one of the chief sounds to be heard were paper boys shouting the news — we were anxious to hear what was happening in the War. The chief sight was to see the hundreds and hundreds of soldiers in uniform and hear them marching to the stations to board trains for the ports to take them to France. Buffets and tea stalls were provided to allow the soldiers to take refreshments before boarding the trains — and it was a sad sight to see the wives and sweethearts wishing their men goodbye — many never returned from the fighting. We office girls used to volunteer for duty at the tea stalls after our day's work. Everyone undertook some duty or another to help the war effort. As soldiers went to France, others began to return and arrived all covered in dirt and mud from the trenches — dug in the earth — where they fought from and when the order came to attack the Germans, they went 'over the top' and into battle. We lost a million dead in the first weeks of the war. We were not prepared for battle, whereas the Germans had been secretly preparing for war for years and our soldiers were simply mown down in thousands. The crowded trains began to arrive in London — it was a dreadful sight to see the wounded arrive, many on stretchers and one day, the dreaded news came that the boy I met at College, and hoped to marry, had been wounded. He went to France at the age of 19 and came back wounded at 21 — he had been in battle, and had sustained wounds that affected him all his life — loss of an eye, facial

paralysis, he was deaf (through the noise of guns) and was in hospital for a long time. The wounded wore blue uniforms to denote they had fought in France. After months of convalescence he returned to the bank in London which he left at 19 to go to the war.

We were strictly rationed for food — only being allowed just enough to keep us alive and what with being bombed by the Germans on our cities and the worry and anxiety of our men fighting in dreadful conditions in France, we became a very depressed nation, but everyone worked hard in factories to further the war effort and in spite of years of privation and war conditions — the spirit of the British people never faltered and each one of us helped the other. One never thought of one's own troubles, everyone else had troubles and anxieties.

When at last the war ended, and we began to rebuild our lives, we thought it had been a war to end all wars, but it was not so. It was sad to see so many men, wounded in the War, some lost a leg or an arm, many were blinded for life and victory over the Germans gave us little satisfaction when we realised the terrible price we had paid in seeing what war had done to our men.

The years after the war were spent trying to get things in order again, and gradually life became more normal.

I married my college friend in 1920 and in spite of his terrible experiences in France, and the fact that he was wounded, he remained the same kind, gentle man, and he never spoke of his fighting days. I asked him once 'Were you frightened in the fighting?' He said 'Very, but I used to hum to myself 'The Lord's my Shepherd' and it was a great comfort'. This is courage, and it was my 64th Wedding anniversary on 4th September 1984 — a lifetime of happiness with the boy I met in college when I was 15 years of age. We were blessed with a son and a daughter, and in 1984 I have eight great grandchildren.

But much water has to go under the bridges before my story ends. The years after the war of 1914 were not easy, as a nation we were endeavouring to get the country settled again, but we were never sure that peace had come.

My children were growing up — they were at school, when there were rumblings of war talk — we who had been through one war dreaded a second. My son and daughter left school and started on their business careers, and still there were whisperings of war and what the Germans were doing, and suddenly we knew they were preparing for a Second World War. We could not believe this would happen again and were in no way ready to fight.

* * * * *

1939

The clouds of war hung low over the world. We awaited the dreaded announcement for the second time in our lives — 'Britain is at war'. The tension was so great — it was almost a relief when it came. We had fought one war and won and by the grace of God we should win a second one. What we did not realise was how different this impending war was to be from the conflict of 1914–18. We were reminded of this by seeing so many of our men who had fought and who were maimed and wounded. Statistics assured us that the proportion of casualties and deaths in the Second World War were but a trifle compared with those of the First World War. The sons of the soldiers who marched so willingly into battle in 1914 were now old enough to be caught up in the machinery of this new war. But there was not time to begin comparisons. Everywhere were signs of preparation for the days to come. In lanes and quiet streets lines of lorries stood, covered with tarpaulins, ready to move off to the south coast for transport to the continent. The dreaded announcement was made over the radio — and everything started to fall into place. Thousands of children were assembled at the railway stations to be taken by train to the country where they were billeted with people who had offered to keep them until the war ended. Each child wore a badge on his coat giving his name and destination. We who had trained as wardens were ready to help in reassuring the public. We wore blue uniforms and helmets were provided. After the warning sirens had gone we assembled at our warden's post — a brick building in a field which had been the pavilion for sports for the local school. In this building were housed maps of the district and wherever trouble came we put flags to show the spot. Householders had been provided with shelters — they were either inside the house or in the garden. Those in the house were strong constructions like tables and as soon as the air raid warning went (we called it moaning minnie, because of the weird noise it made) householders would go under the shelter in the house or into the one in the garden. One always kept one's clothes ready and any valuables packed and thermos flasks with hot drinks and food. Some shelters were equipped like extra rooms! After the first warning we wardens saw that the people in the section allocated to us were safely in their shelters, then ran to the post to await instructions. When the 'all clear' went (for the warning had been a false alarm) I ran back down the road and a neighbour said to me 'You are as white as death'. I said 'Oh! that's face powder I put on in a hurry' but I never knew it was fear that made me look white! The first warning had come as such a shock, though we were expecting it. This phoney war continued for weeks — it began quietly enough, we waited day by day for

the first attack.

Food was beginning to get scarce and we all had ration cards in return for which we were allowed small quantities of meat and eggs, sugar and butter. Also clothes coupons were issued — we could only buy clothes to the value of the clothing coupons.

Troops were beginning to move by lorry and train. Girls were volunteering for duty in the women's services, army, air force and navy. All were provided with uniforms. Older women were called up to work in factories making uniforms — there were button factories who supplied all the buttons needed for the uniforms.

Other girls took on duties at tea stalls to provide food and drink to the soldiers and sailors as they started off for the Continent, as in the first world war.

After two years working in the bank in London my son received his 'calling up' papers and joined the Tank Regiment at 19 years of age — and went to train to be wireless operator, driver and gunner of a tank. He finally went to North Africa with the 8th Army and was away from home for six years. My daughter joined the W.A.A.F. (Women's Auxillary Air Force) and trained as a radar operator and travelled to many camps on duty. She would see any enemy plane or ship monitored on her screen and reported it.

War was 'hotting up' and the bombing began in earnest. Every evening as dusk came planes would drone overhead and a loud explosion told us a bomb had found its target. All lights were out as soon as evening came — black out curtains had to be used at every window and wardens would go round inspecting houses for chinks of light that might help the enemy. The bombing continued relentlessly and if one had to be in the street at all one risked being hit by shrapnel as the bombs burst. Everyone would run to the shelters — but one day I saw a milkman standing by his horse during a raid and I said 'You'd better take shelter'. He said 'I'm not leaving my horse, he's frightened'.

The streets were almost deserted. All the young children and old people had been evacuated to safe places. All the men had gone into the forces and had gone overseas.

Recruiting offices sprang up like mushrooms and those who could not joint the forces were offering themselves for every kind of voluntary work.

Bombing of our cities continued. London was at first the main target but as the war continued Birmingham, Liverpool, Coventry and the docks were attacked. As our area was in the 'lane' for bombing London the incessant noise of planes passing overhead was terrifying and any bombs that fell short of London fell in our area.

As the war continued food became in short supply as so many ships coming from Canada, Australia and New Zealand in convoy were either torpedoed or bombed by the Germans and sunk. Our rations, only obtainable with ration cards were barely enough for us — prices were lower than now, the value of money was worth more, for instance, until 1939 when the second war came food had been cheap and plentiful. You could get a 3-course meal in a cafe for 1/6d (7½p), tea cost 2/8d per lb (13½p) and a large loaf was 4½d (about 1½p). Ten cigarettes for 6d (2½p). Before decimalisation the money was — 12 pence to a shilling, 20 shillings to a pound, four farthings to a penny and two farthings to a halfpenny. A two shilling piece (now 10p) was a florin, and a two and sixpenny piece was a half-a-crown, and there were 10 shilling notes and pound notes. Accounts were settled in guineas, a guinea being worth £1. 1s.. We are told that £1 today is worth 8p in 1938. By 1939 there were two millions cars on the road and prices of cars were low by today's standard. A new Baby Austin cost £128 and petrol was 1/11d a gallon! A new house cost £425, or you could buy one for £25 down and 10/3d (approximately 51p) a week.

Fearing gas would be used by the Germans — 40 million gas masks were distributed. Every person and every child carried one everywhere they went.

Every person who was capable of working was compelled by law to do some work to help the war effort. I applied at the local hospital and though I could not do duty as a nurse I was accepted in the library as a hospital librarian (untrained) and at another hospital I was engaged as a secretary by two surgeons (one Dr William Evans), a Cardiac specialist from the London Hospital and another surgeon Mr McLellan of Harley Street. These surgeons came down from London to their weekly clinics. Sometimes I helped the radiologist too. I was a warden on duty at nights but because I was a voluntary worker and did not earn money the authorities said I would have to go and work in a button factory. I was taken before a tribunal and my case was reviewed. I told the members I was a warden, I worked at two hospitals, both my son and daughter were in the armed forces, my husband had been a victim of the 1914 war but did duty as a warden and I considered that was enough, and after due consideration I was allowed to continue my voluntary duties!

It was my work in the Oldchurch Hospital that proved the most interesting. The library at that time was in a damp, dark out-building, where they also kept sacks of potatoes and used it as a storage place. But shortly after I started work, we were given a large airy room actually in the hospital building with thousands of new books, and also after a short time

a new book trolley arrived from the Red Cross! — and Miss Peel (the trained librarian) was so delighted she told me I had brought them luck. So each with a trolley we commenced work in the main hospital. I was not very knowledgeable about books but I found the work brought me into close contact with the patients. We had 400 beds altogether and everyone was filled because by this time bombing was going on in real earnest and many victims were being admitted. Several attempts were made to bomb the hospital and one day an oil bomb was dropped on the building and it was marvellous to see the nurses at work wheeling the patients in their beds to another ward. Quickly and quietly it was done — no fuss and order restored. Whenever the warning went to take cover people rushed to the air raid shelter, and on one occasion I was crossing the hospital grounds and a bomber came down low. He swooped so low he nearly hit the hospital building, he did not drop a bomb fortunately — he was only spying out the land for future attack. As he came low I did what we were told to do — fell flat on my face on the ground and prayed he didn't see me!

Although bombs were being dropped all around the town, work carried on remarkably smoothly. People went about their everyday business quite as usual, but when planes passed over they ran for shelter or fell flat on the ground. Essex was in a direct 'lane' for the Germans to approach London and it was when they did not reach London that they dropped their bombs, because they knew as they approached London our anti-aircraft guns would be trained on them and they would be blown to bits so they preferred to drop their bombs before reaching London and fly back to Germany. Every bomb dropped meant death and destruction and fresh admission to the hospital. Oil bombs were used often, they caused much havoc. And land mines devastated whole areas. Houses and buildings collapsed and one never knew whose turn it would be next. Moonlight nights were dreaded because the Germans could see where to drop their bombs. They picked out certain buildings to destroy them. After a night raid London was hardly recognisable, whole areas were devastated. Before my son had to join the army he was riding on a bus to the bank and a hit and run bomber dropped a bomb on the bus in front, and there were arms and legs flying in all directions as the bomb destroyed the crowded bus, and when my son arrived at his bank it had been completely demolished in a night raid. There was much to be done in the hospital and I often stayed there all day and went home for a meal and changed into my uniform and went to the post on duty. There was no let up in bombing and the roar of the engines as the planes came over was frightening. The night I remember well was the night 500 German planes

came over on their way to bomb London, and Birmingham and Coventry. As I listened the noise they made was deafening — the whole earth seemed to tremble with vibration. And next morning London was smoking and in ruins in many parts. Casualties were enormous and those of us who live to remember that night marvel at the way London and other towns have recovered. Although in the 1914 War many civilians were killed by shrapnel falling, in this last war the civilians were as much in the war conflict as the armed forces. No-one ever knew who would next be killed. Yet we went about our business as if no danger existed. Big shelters saved many lives and in London thousands of people took their bedding and slept in the tube tunnels for safety. Even then they managed to have a sense of humour. They sang and danced before settling down to sleep and tea stalls were set up and voluntary workers made tea for the people. Next morning they would emerge from their shelter to begin another day's work. It was a remarkable thing to discover how kind people were in those days, giving help and comfort whenever needed. The Salvation Army did magnificent work. I am quite sure that if Hitler had realised how short of ammunition and food we were, he would have made one thrust at us with his mighty 'big Bertha' guns trained on England and his huge supply of planes, he could have won the war. But we were also retaliating over Germany with our planes and devastating German towns. That at least was some satisfaction to us and when our airmen had successfully 'got his target' over a German town, we knew he had succeeded by him rolling over and over in the sky and doing the 'Victory' roll! That lightened our hearts!

Hospitals were now almost full to capacity, and more and more victims of the raids were coming in. One land mine fell on our local town near the hospital and did much damage to the houses. And I was surprised that morning when I went on duty with my trolley to see Miss Peel, our trained librarian, in a side ward in a hospital bed! It appeared she had taken refuge in the cupboard under the stairs when she heard the air raid warning, and just popped her head out of the cupboard door to see what was happening when the bomb went off and sent her front door to the back of the house, as it went it caught her face and damaged her nose! She could easily have had her head chopped off. Windows smashed, gates and doors flung all over the place! Glass everywhere!

Many victims of that raid were brought in — many of them neighbours from the same road.

Still work went on in the hospital, nurses flitted about and managed a smile and a cheery 'Good Morning' to all the patients! In spite of the horrors of the bombing in those days there was a wonderful spirit of

comradeship among people, a feeling 'we're all in this together'. That was one of the good things that came out of the war.

There was much to be done on the wards and those of us who were not nurses helped all we could — to feed the patients or attend to their wants. Everyone did whatever was needed, one never heard a complaint. I even helped with the bathing of patients one day!

During those busy days I learned much about people. One met all kinds and especially when on duty with my book trolley I found the books were a medium to get to know the people and before long they were confiding in me and telling me of their worries and I tried to help them. It was a most satisfying experience. As a voluntary librarian I shared duties with the trained librarian. So that I saw patients every other week. One old man in the men's ward was badly injured when I asked 'would you like a book to read?' He said, 'No, never 'ad no time for readin'! so I said what is your work? He said 'I'm a shoe snob' (which meant a shoe repairer). So I went to my usual shop where I often bought books and cards for patients, I asked him if he had a book about shoe repairing. He said 'yes, here is one — a shilling'. I bought it and took it to the man on the ward. He was so delighted with it because it had a bright picture with a shoe on the last, the man just raising his arm to knock a nail in: The man said 'Ah, *that't* what I like — that's my job'. He rallied round after that and the next time I was on the ward his wife came up to me and said 'Thank you for getting that book, my husband is showing interest in life and is getting better'. That's what made my work so satisfying.

On the women's ward, in a side ward, was a Mrs Davis, who had sustained injuries in a raid. She had an arm in a sling, and I asked her if she would like a book. She said — have you been to see the damage done by the bomb. I said 'no, but as I passed her road I noticed the trees had disappeared and there was much more light. She said that's where my house was — we had a direct hit and my maid was killed. Her arm was bandaged and they feared it would have to be amputated. However she was fortunate and it was restored. She left the hospital after many weeks and I gave her a gift of a pretty sandwich set, as she had lost her home and everything in it and when her husband came to take her away she said 'Look darling, our first thing in our new home!' Whenever the librarian wanted me to pay particular attention to a paitent she put a note on my trolley and one morning I was asked to see a patient on the women's ward who was not making progress. As I went round the ward I came to her bed and asked her if she would like a book to read. She said abruptly, 'No, I don't want a book — I just want to die'. She was very ill and had been badly hurt in a raid. I chatted to her and she cheered up and I wrote

her a letter that night, as I often did, and gave her some thoughts about what she would do when she left hospital. She much improved and when I saw her again she pointed to me and said to the older paients — 'She did it, that's the one who made me want to live again.' On the day she left hospital she sent for me in the day room to thank me for what I had done to help her. As I went round with the books I came to a side ward where two paitents were, one was a typical gipsy — jet black hair parted in the middle, big round earrings and a very brown wrinkled face. She would not take a book, but when I picked one up off the trolley and said 'This looks interesting, it's called 'Death on the Hopfields', she snatched it from me and said 'I'd like that one — I've worked on the hopfields for thirty years!' — apparently she could not read, but kept the book and it seemed to give her comfort!!

The war still raged and soldiers were being flown home every day — the hospitals were filled to overflowing. A special ward had been reserved for these men and soon every bed was occupied. The men soon became bored with nothing to do, so I went to a local shop and bought large quantities of coloured felt and material for stuffing toys and showed them how to make rabbits and other toys and soon they were turning out dozens of toys and selling them to visitors! I told the superintendent of the hospital about this and he said 'Will you go with Miss Peel and select a large empty room in the part of the hospital that was still the workhouse'. We chose a room and it was decorated in green and cream paint, and looms and tables set up and soon the soldiers were busy making stools, and handbags and all kinds of leather goods. A trained occupational therapist had been appointed from London — and my humble effort at trying to interest the soldiers in toy making, led to a thriving occupational department being opened! Which still exists after all these years!

In a side ward were two enemy pilots who had been shot down by our anti-aircraft guns — one was a German, I think the other was a Polish airman. The German asked for a book by Shakespeare in German but the other man said, 'I don't want a book — all I want to do is to get back in the air and shoot guns!' He was quickly removed. Two soldiers with fixed bayonets guarded the German.

In the old days there were many tramps (called vagrants) who wandered from one workhouse to another — and when they arrived at the place they had to hand in all their possessions, and were given some food and a mug of cocoa and a night's lodging. They had to perform a task like chopping wood in the morning before reclaiming their bundles and moving on, but sometimes if they had any special treasures they would hide them under the hedges so the authorities did not see them.

There were women vagrants as well and they were housed in a new building that until war started was to be a model home for the aged. These women would often cut the sheets on their beds and fold the top piece over to look as if the sheets were whole and they had even been known to steal the curtains!! The vagrants still wandered the countryside in spite of the bombing which continued relentlessly.

Soldiers were being flown home from France and Belgium so quickly after a battle that we used to say 'they had not time to lose their colour!' They arrived, maimed and blinded, and came into the hospital to be sorted out and sent to other hospitals in the country. It was a kind of clearing station.

Still the injured civilians came and went, and the beds were all filled — there were 600 patients.

In the hospital grounds stood a big brick building, that was the maternity ward. They had their own library, as books from the general wards were never allowed there. One day I went into one room and a patient was sitting up knitting. She had lovely blue eyes and I asked her if she would like a book. She said 'No thank you, I can't read'. I said 'Your education must have been badly neglected then' and we laughed and she said 'You see I'm blind'. I did not know what to say and prayed that I would say the right thing. I asked how she could knit if she couldn't see and she said she knitted a row, then sister came and turned the knitting round! On my next visit to the ward I saw her again. She was broken-hearted — her baby son had died at birth — that was one of the sad memories I had — to think she had lost her baby.

Another patient in a spinal bed — she had to lie flat, gave a lot of trouble — nothing could please her and she was rude to me and to the doctor, who said 'You can do nothing with her'. So I talked to her and asked if she would do someting for me. She hesitated and said 'What is it.' I said would she copy Patience Strong's writings in a book each day for me, as it would cheer some of the other patients up! She started and every day she wrote in the book I gave her — till it was full! She was a changed person and the doctors were amazed. You see her illness made her very bitter and unhappy, but to be asked to help others gave her a purpose in life and she became kind and cheerful. That was a success story!

One day sister asked me to see a certain patient and when I went on the ward I could see she was someone special, for she was allowed flowers and fruit and books and even a picture which was most unusual in a general ward. I introduced myself and she told me she was Annette Mills, sister of John Mills the actor. She had been in a car accident and sustained

very serious injuries. Both hands were damaged and her legs, too, she could not write so she asked if I would do her confidential correspondence. This I did and helped her in other ways. I would always give her her tea (she loved celery) — as the nurses were very busy, and glad of help. The bombs were still falling around us and Annette (who made famous the lovable puppet called 'Muffin the Mule'. The children loved her programme on television (as I did!) but she wondered if she would ever play the piano again. She wanted her daughter (the artist Molly Blake) to come to be near her and she asked if I knew of an hotel where she could stay. I said I did not know of one I could recommend but as my son and daughter were away in the Forces, Molly was welcome to stay in my house. She gratefully accepted the offer and Molly proved a very delightful person. Annette's two nieces — Hayley Mills and the elder one who was called 'Bunch' — it was she who was taken on the stage in a clothes basket when John Mills was rehearsing his part in 'This Happy Breed' and this film was on at the cinema near the hospital and all the nurses were allowed to go to see the film free as a gesture from John Mills! Eventually Annette was taken to the London Hospital for operations on her hands, and many months after I was watching television and was surprised to see her playing the piano! I wrote her and said 'If your hands are better now, give me a sign on television' and she did. She spread her fingers out and gave a wonderful smile — I was overjoyed. That was another happy story!

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Part of my duties was to go every fortnight to visit the homes of old people. I was allowed 2½ gallons of petrol a month for this purpose! and in one home was a lady called Mrs Suckling. She asked me if I could get her the book 'In the Steps of the Master'. The next visit I took the book and she was delighted with it. On my next visit I found a bomb had been dropped on the Home and a piece of the ceiling fell on her and killed her, and in her hands was the book 'In the Steps of the Master' — a sad story indeed.

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In the hospital was an old lady who always noticed what I wore. One time I wore a white blouse and blue suit and next time a blue blouse and grey suit and one day this old lady said 'I don't *like* you today'. I said 'why not?' She said 'because you haven't got your pretty blue blouse on!' So I wore it to please her everytime I went on duty till it almost fell to pieces, but she was happy!

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There was the old lady who asked me 'Can you get me the book called 'Pride & Prejudice'?' I thought it a strange request, for she did not interest herself in any other book. She said 'My Dad had that in his bookcase when I was a child'. I often noticed among the elderly patients a desire to recapture the pleasure of memories of the past. As indeed happens to all of us, or else this book would never have been written by me! I need not say that she never read the book but seemed happy just to hold it in her hands!

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With the bombing of our cities and the daily problems we had to face it was a relief to me to go to the hospital and be in the company of the patients. They were helpless when the bombing started and intensified. One day Matron told me I must go down to the air raid shelter when the siren went as the authorities could not be held responsible for voluntary workers. I said 'But matron, the patients cannot go to the shelter, they just have to lie on their beds and listen to the bombs falling, so I would rather remain on the wards with them'. She just smiled and nodded and said no more, so I still went about my business.

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One amusing incident was when one day I went into the fried fish shop for my lunch and the warning went and planes could be heard overhead droning past — and at my table was a mother with her child and she at once picked her purse up off the table and dived under the table and left her baby on the chair! As the fighting ceased she realised what she had done and we both laughed! We were taught that whenever we heard the planes overhead we should dive for any cover we could or at least fall flat on the ground!

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We did not realise we were nearly at the end of the war — about six weeks later the Armistice was signed which made Britain once more the victor. But that day my home help looked round my room and said 'You know your room does look nice, Ma'am'. I said 'Yes, if Hitler doesn't pay us a visit.' That night at 8.30 my husband and I were sitting ready to go on duty in our uniforms with helmet and torch ready, when the whole earth shuddered and a battle was going on overhead. We had always been told that you never heard the bomb that hit you. We heard nothing but a terrible crunch — smashing of glass and cracking of walls. The front door was blown along the hall to the back of the house — the front gates disappeared — the garage was flattened — the window panes and frames were blown out and the curtains from the windows were sucked in

between the bricks on the opposite side of the wall. The doors all disappeared and a huge hole was made in the hall floor. I jumped over the back of the settee just as the centre light in the ceiling began to swing violently and as I tried to get up the stairs to my daughter who was expecting her baby in a few weeks' time she called 'Don't come up here for God's sake, there's a hole in the floor.' As I struggled up the stairs I had the sensation of swimming in water — but it was the dust and rubble rushing down the stairs. The roof of the house had disappeared and cracks were in all the walls. When eventually I reached my daughter her pillow was black with dust and covered in fine glass, but thankfully she was safe, though the new pram she had bought for the baby was completely smashed. When I went into the bedroom the wardrobe had been thrown over the bed and the whole place was a shambles. Then I heard the different rescue services arrive — the whole area was cordened off by wardens — only the services were allowed in the road. The bomb had fallen on the 10 houses opposite and twelve people were killed. The houses were flattened to the ground, and were just piles of rubble. A man in a white coat came and asked 'Have you light still, and water and telephone. By a sheer miracle in spite of the blast, all three were functioning. He said 'Right from now on the 'phone is for the services only'. And soon there was a queue lined up — the services were telephoning for relief. The gate and the front door had disappeared and soon a number of Red Cross nurses came through the hall to what was left of the kitchen. That was to be their Red Cross headquarters. The nurse emptied my bread bin and said 'We shall need this for boiling water in to sterilize our instruments. Everywhere the floors were covered in inches of fine dust and glass and I found my hair was thick with grit and powdered glass! So was my daughter's! The nurses soon got down to business and the first victim of the raid walked in — careful to avoid the hole in the floor of the hall as he sat down to have his face treated — the nurse said 'where do you live?' My husband said 'I live here — this is my house'. She just said 'Oh my God' and proceeded to clean up his face which was badly bleeding as he had been cut by flying glass, when he had been treated the doctor insisted on my husband going down to the garden shelter to rest as he was so ill after the raid. The houses that had been blown down belonged to members of our wardens' section and we knew all the people and we used to go round every evening to see if they were all prepared to take cover if a raid started. The head warden came to me and asked if I could help him. He wanted to know who had been killed and wanted me to identify them as the bodies lay in the front gardens covered by black cloths. One by one I recognised each one,

but could not find the three children of one of the women. So the chief warden sent for dogs to be sent to trace the children's bodies. They arrived and in spite of fighting going on in the air all lights on the vehicles were put on to show the dogs where they had to work. I have never witnessed such a scene — rubble high — gates gone — the dead lying covered up and the dogs stood perfectly still then began slowly to move over the pile of rubble. In a short while one dog began to paw at the ground and we knew he had found a child beneath. Then the other dog moved round and stood still for a minute and pawed at the ground. They had found the three children, dead. Then the workmen began to clear the space and eventually the remains of the children were brought to the surface. Altogether twelve people died — when their houses collapsed — and later we learnt that a man had been walking on the pavement as the bomb fell was picked up by the blast and thrown through the roof of a bungalow a few houses away from ours. Bedsteads and furniture were thrown over the allotments — and the washing I had left on my line in the garden disappeared, never to be found again! Then — the firing ceased and the 'all clear' went and the rescue work went on all night. I cannot describe the scene the next day — it was sheer devastation. We could no longer live in our houses — those who had places to go to, went, and if they had nowhere to go, people were taken to the Rest centres in the town. So ended a night we are not likely to forget and after all these forty years or more it is still vivid in our minds. My husband, daughter and myself went into the country to stay with our aunts and cousins who had promised us a home for such a need as this. Eventually we were able to return to a very much patched-up house — we had lost our home but were grateful that we had been spared, and that our little grand daughter had been born safely to my daughter. It was a miracle.

FINIS

And now at the age of 86, and with eight great grandchildren who may enjoy reading a little bit about 'Great Granma's Life', I am quietly content, and very, very grateful for the love of family and friends. My prayer is that these little ones will never know the horrors of war, but if it is to be so, all I ask is that they will be given the strength to come through any ordeal demanded of them and to remember —

'In quietness and confidence shall be your strength'